

**J**OHAN STEED, immaculate agent of bowler-hat-and-brolly fame, was last seen in a rocket heading out into Space with Tara King. That was in the final episode of *The Avengers*, shot seven years ago. There was a whispered promise: "They will return . . ." And back now with a bang come Steed and two new aides—ravishing, leggy Purdey and steely-eyed Mike Gambit. They are the dynamic trio of *The New Avengers*. The first of twenty-six episodes starts on ITV on October 20. Here is the dramatic, exclusive story behind the intriguing *Avengers* cult. And the lowdown on Steed, Purdey and Gambit.

by **DON SHORT**

**FASTEN** your safety belts. Purdey is lethal, all set to sabotage the television ratings of the lollipop-sucking *Kojak* and those jeans-clad innocents, *Starsky and Hutch*.

How can they compete against Purdey's most dangerous of weapons — Folies-fashioned legs sheathed in black stockings hitched to the daintiest of suspender belts?

*Just who is Purdey?* An actress called Joanna Lumley who plays a new super television girl sleuth with a Secret Service mission.

Viewers will surrender as readily as the villains Purdey pursues in *The New Avengers*.

John Steed alias Patrick Macnee, now as much a part of the British criminal scene as Sherlock Holmes, is still the boss.

Mike Gambit, new male on the *Avengers* scene, is played by dark, handsome Gareth Hunt. He was a footman in *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

The trio's mission is to protect Britain from all perils . . . and the action is explosive. Every hair-raising situation is exploited.

### Cool, elegant

The *Avengers* discover that Hitler has been kept in deep freeze and is about to be brought back to life by surviving Nazis.

In another episode our fearless trio face deadly Cybernauts — a half-human, half-robot species. And, of course, they come up against Russian agents.

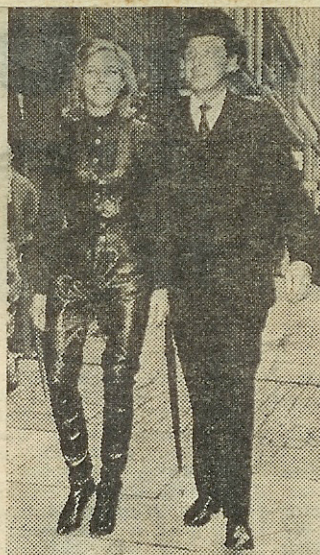
Through the thick of it all strides the lissom Purdey, split skirts flaunting her black suspender belts.

Her predecessors, Cathy Gale, Emma Peel and Tara King, sensual as they were, take a back seat.

"Joanna is going to shake them all," says director Ray Austin. "She is the most complete sexual animal."

*Exaggeration?*

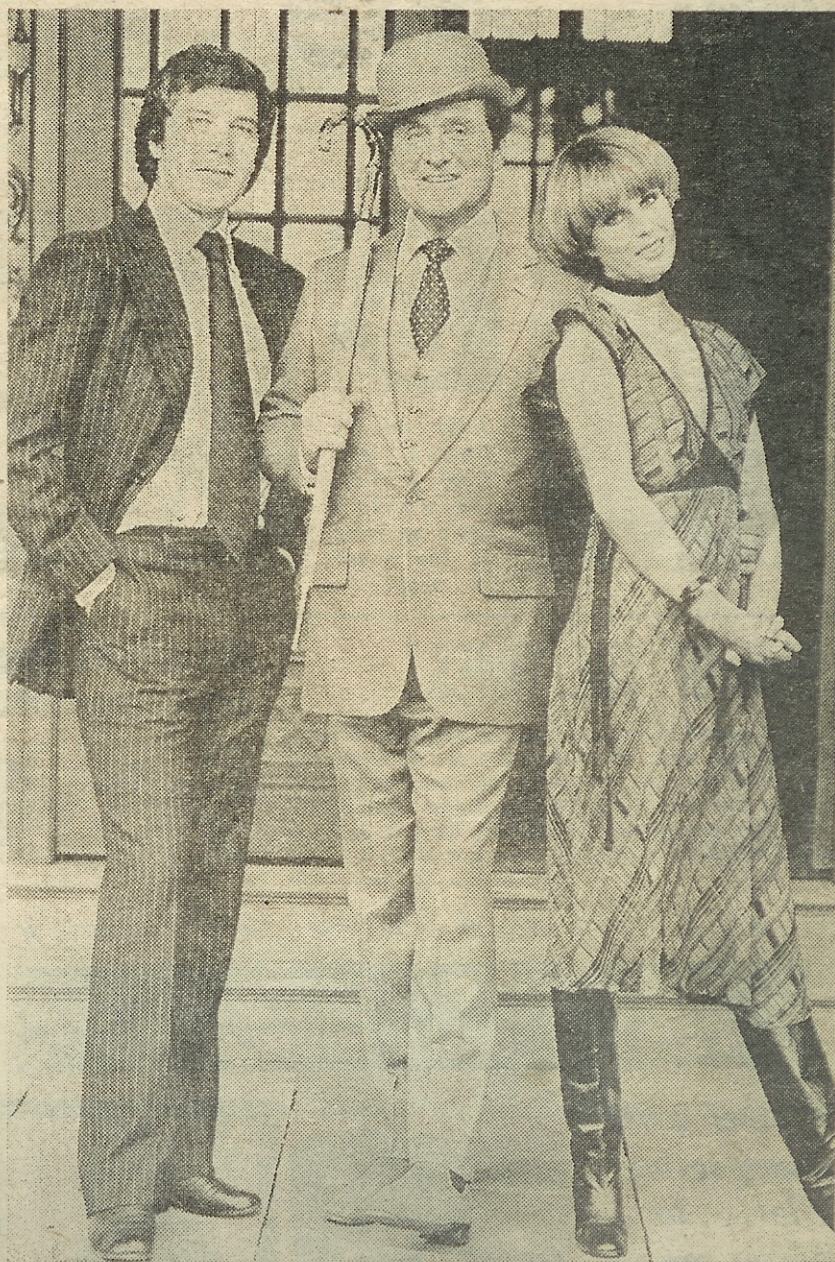
No way! I sat through a noyack preview of two



Honor Blackman . . . original leather-clad Cathy Gale.

# THE

**Stand by for Britain's new saviour**



*Avengers '76*: Gareth Hunt as Gambit; Macnee as Steed, and Joanna Lumley, the lethal Purdey (also pictured opposite).

former Indian Army Gurkha major, trained for the part with Paratroopers on an Aldershot assault course. She believes in leaving little for the stunt girls. She says: "I don't play the role

black leather-clad Cathy Gale at the start.

Cathy's leather look was accidental, "poached from a New York fashion show by Patrick Macnee. He thought blonde Honor would look

time Linda Thorson stepped in as Tara King the vogue had turned to mini skirt and boots. Which brought other problems Linda says:

"We had to be careful

## Looking back

with John Griffith

After a mauling in the TV ratings — particularly on Saturday nights — ITV are hoping to fight back with the strong Friday night line-up introduced last night.

The star turn is the return of *The Avengers*, and as a one time addict I feared *The New Avengers* would be a disappointment.

I needn't have worried. On last night's showing, the *Avengers* are back at their best.

It is those little offbeat things that have always made the series so superb. The throwaway lines, the oddities, and the sheer style that carries the whole improbably fantasy along.

Steed is so smooth, he hardly bothers to don his bowler for crimes which show less ambition than the takeover of the country. Last night's adventure was a typical plot — as daft as a pantomime but ten times as entertaining.

A kidnapped scientist, a remote Scottish isle, a group of Nazi soldiers planning a comeback . . . all the ingredients are old but the tongue in cheek treatment makes them seem as fresh as they did the day the first *Avengers* adventure was shown in January 1961.

Joanna Lumley as Purdey is a worthy successor to Cathy Gale

the dramatic, exclusive story behind the intriguing Avengers cult. And the lowdown on Steed, Purdey and Gambit.

## by DON SHORT

**FASTEN** your safety belts. Purdey is lethal, all set to sabotage the television ratings of the lollipop-sucking Kojak and those jeans-clad innocents, Starsky and Hutch.

How can they compete against Purdey's most dangerous of weapons — Folies-fashioned legs sheathed in black stockings hitched to the daintiest of suspender belts?

*Just who is Purdey?*  
An actress called Joanna Lumley who plays a new super television girl sleuth with a Secret Service mission.

Viewers will surrender as readily as the villains Purdey pursues in *The New Avengers*.

John Steed alias Patrick Macnee, now as much a part of the British criminal scene as Sherlock Holmes, is still the boss.

Mike Gambit, new male on the Avengers scene, is played by dark, handsome Gareth Hunt. He was a footman in *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

The trio's mission is to protect Britain from all perils . . . and the action is explosive. Every hair-raising situation is exploited.

### Cool, elegant

The Avengers discover that Hitler has been kept in deep freeze and is about to be brought back to life by surviving Nazis.

In another episode our fearless trio face deadly Cybernauts — a half-human, half-robot species. And, of course, they come up against Russian agents.

Through the thick of it all strides the lissom Purdey, split skirts flaunting her black suspender belts.

Her predecessors, Cathy Gale, Emma Peel and Tara King, sensual as they were, take a back seat.

"Joanna is going to shake them all," says director Ray Austin. "She is the most complete sexual animal."

*Exaggeration?*  
No way! I sat through a sneak preview of two New Avengers' episodes and I assure you: The luscious Lumley is a turn-on.

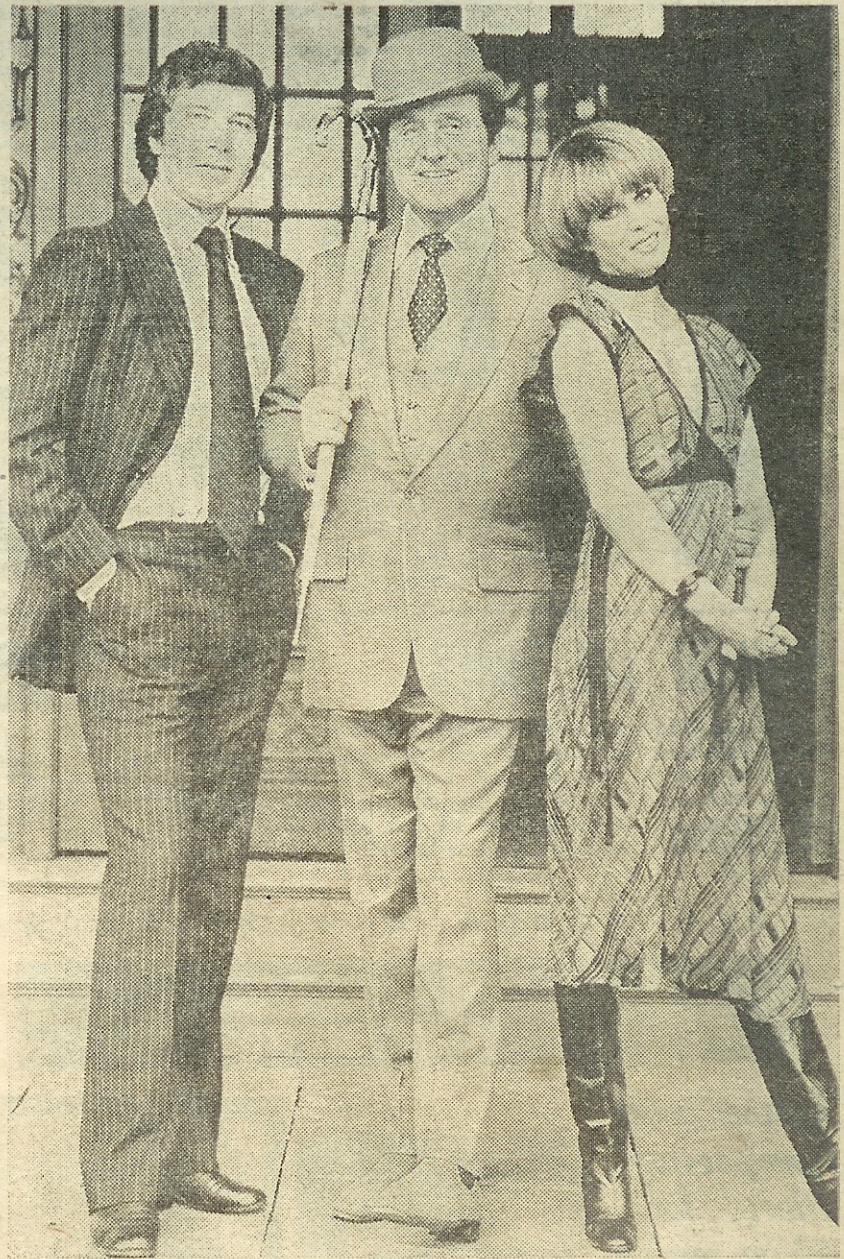
Cool, sophisticated, elegant, devastating.

She meshes through the gears of her yellow sports car (called Banana Split on the set) with urgent rhythm.

She produces a Colt pistol with a conjurer's sleight of hand. She scuttles her assailants with judo black belt finesse.

Joanna, daughter of a

Honor Blackman . . . original leather-clad Cathy Gale.



Avengers '76: Gareth Hunt as Gambit; Macnee as Steed, and Joanna Lumley, the lethal Purdey (also pictured opposite).

former Indian Army Gurkha major, trained for the part with Paratroopers on an Aldershot assault course. She believes in leaving little for the stunt girls. She says:

"I don't play the role as a new sex symbol, but I know some people interpret it like that.

"Maybe it's my black stockings and suspenders. They are sexy, aren't they?"

There is another term for them on the studio floor.

"Dead kinky," says one of the Avengers TV production crew.

The kinky cult must owe its origin to the Avengers. Honor Blackman appeared as the

black leather-clad Cathy Gale at the start.

Cathy's leather look was accidental, poached from a New York fashion show by Patrick Macnee. He thought blonde Honor would look ravishing in it.

"It inspired sexual connotations," says Patrick. "It was no secret that leather, rubber or any second skin, look is a form of sexual deviation.

"But until then such deviations were kept under cover. Honor's gear brought the kinky world out into the open."

Diana Rigg, who took over from Honor, developed the trend as Emma Peel, but by the

time Linda Thorson stepped in as Tara King the vogue had turned to mini skirts and boots. Which brought other problems. Linda says:

"We had to be careful about the touchy American censor.

"If I jumped over a couch and flashed my knickers the shot would have to be re-taken.

"In a mini-skirt it was almost impossible not to show your knickers! And a low-cut evening gown could not show too much boob."

Now attitudes are much more liberal. There should be no repercussions for the new-look Purdey.

"The question now,"

## Looking back

with John Griffith

After a mauling in the TV ratings — particularly on Saturday nights — ITV are hoping to fight back with the strong Friday night line-up introduced last night.

The star turn is the return of *The Avengers*, and as a one time addict I feared *The New Avengers* would be a disappointment.

I needn't have worried. On last night's showing, the Avengers are back at their best.

It is those little offbeat things that have always made the series so superb. The throwaway lines, the oddities, and the sheer style that carries the whole improbably fantasy along.

Steed is so smooth, he hardly bothers to don his bowler for crimes which show less ambition than the takeover of the country. Last night's adventure was a typical plot — as daft as a pantomime but ten times as entertaining.

A kidnapped scientist, a remote Scottish isle, a group of Nazi soldiers planning a comeback . . . all the ingredients are old but the tongue in cheek treatment makes them seem as fresh as they did the day the first Avengers adventure was shown in January 1961.

Joanna Lumley as Purdey is a worthy successor to Cathy Gale and Emma Peel. I'm not sure how Mike Gambit (Gareth Hunt) fits in, but if he helps the action along I'm not complaining.

Bringing old ideas back rarely works. *The New Avengers* is a glorious exception, though it will mean a difficult decision each Friday from next week when the excellent *When the Boat Comes In* returns at the same time on BBC-1.

The battle for viewers between BBC and ITV is a real pain in the neck when programmes clash like this. But overall it is probably the most effective way to keep both channels on their toes.

# ULTIMATE AVENGER



**Linda Thorson, as Tara King, last of the old line, flaunted the mini.**

reasons Joanna, "is tights, or stockings and suspenders? And I've always hated tights."

Quite. But the Avengers rather thrive on the bizarre.

Says co-producer Brian Clemens: "The sexual tensions are good. Under the surface The Avengers has been seen as a very Freudian show, with classic relationships touching the sadistic and masochistic. Most letters we get are from university dons and intellectuals who see through the innuendos."

Cranks have also derived suspect pleasure. Suggestive, anonymous letters have swamped the studios over the years for Honor, Diana and Linda.

this day and age," she says. "There is nothing more one can do on the screen to shock."

Joanna was chosen

Joanna. "Something slightly masculine . . ."

"Purdey," she blurted out. "Purdey?" he queried.

Rudolph Roffi wanted to make a champagne TV commercial.

He asked if John Steed and Tara King were available.

Patrick Macnee and Linda Thorson shot the commercial at Elstree in a day. And the nostalgia burned deep.

Roffi was amazed to learn that The Avengers was no longer being made.

"Are the British crazy?" he asked.

"The British are so parochial in their thinking. How much do you need?"

"About £4,000,000," Fennell told him.

A week later Roffi telephoned him from Paris saying, "I've got half of the money. When can you start?"

past The Avengers," she says. "I don't want to delve back in the past. I rarely read the same book twice."

But her personality left its stamp on The Avengers. She took over the Tara King role when Clemens and Fennell were out of the series.

They were fired over a policy row, but within six weeks Thames TV were pleading with them to return. They did—as co-producers with total control.

They inherited Linda, and neither of them thought she would measure up to Honor or Diana. Clemens says:

"She was 20, straight out of drama school, expecting to be a star overnight. She hadn't the experience

telling me what I know my RADA degree didn't know much, but it wasn't dumb."

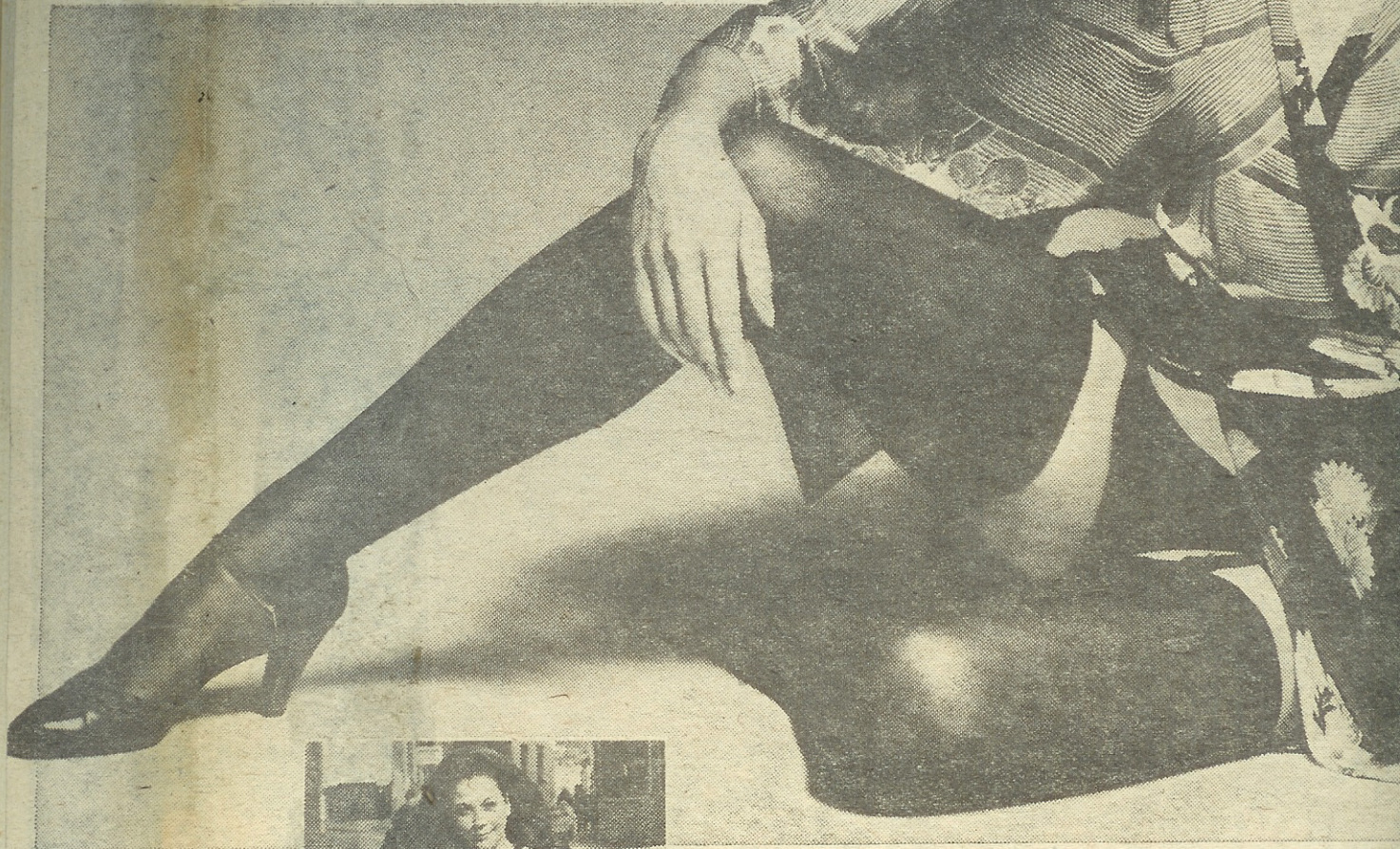
"They terrify about how I got the set, the way I acted my lines, part in the series."

"I got 400 letters saying, 'you think you're over?' I don't know, because I've never seen Honor in the role of a student and afford TV."

"I bought a house for my first day studio because nothing good would spill anything on the studio floor."

"I prayed I wouldn't be a morning I took the studio back."

# AVENGER



**Linda Thorson, as Tara King, last of the old line, flaunted the mini.**

reasons Joanna, "is tights, or stockings and suspenders? And I've always hated tights."

Quite. But the Avengers rather thrive on the bizarre.

Says co-producer Brian Clemens: "The sexual tensions are good. Under the surface The Avengers has been seen as a very Freudian show, with classic relationships touching the sadistic and masochistic. Most letters we get are from university dons and intellectuals who see through the innuendos."

Cranks have also derived suspect pleasure. Suggestive, anonymous letters have swamped the studios over the years for Honor, Diana and Linda.

Linda says: "Some people obviously thought we were kinky in real life. Some of the letters were frightening."

"I also got a lot of anonymous phone calls. One of the callers still phones today."

"He seems to know all my movements. It sends a shiver down my spine."

New recruit Joanna Lumley is chilled, but hopes there will be nothing like that. She thinks audiences are now more sexually educated. "Sex has no impact in

this day and age," she says. "There is nothing more one can do on the screen to shock."

Joanna was chosen from a thousand girls—by Avengers producers Brian Clemens and Albert Fennell. Clemens says: "The casting session ran for weeks."

"We whittled our final selection down to fifteen."

"Joanna got the part. She was head and shoulders above everybody else."

Joanna's name in the script was Charlie. Then Clemens heard there was a perfume called Charlie.

"Any ideas for another name?" he asked

Joanna. "Something slightly masculine . . ."

"Purdey," she blurted out. "Purdey?" he queried.

"It's the name of a famous shotgun," she said. "The most elegant and expensive of them all. Perfect to handle. Deadly accurate."

Now Clemens was sure he had the right girl.

The birth of The New Avengers came by an odd twist.

French entrepreneur

Rudolph Roffi wanted to make a champagne TV commercial.

He asked if John Steed and Tara King were available.

Patrick Macnee and Linda Thorson shot the commercial at Elstree in a day. And the nostalgia burned deep.

Roffi was amazed to learn that The Avengers was no longer being made.

"Are the British crazy?" he asked.

"The British are so parochial in their thinking. How much do you need?"

"About £4,000,000," Fennell told him.

A week later Roffi telephoned him from Paris saying, "I've got half of the money. When can you start?"

Patrick Macnee was cabled in America. Linda Thorson's name was omitted from the comeback plans.

She didn't take it as a snub. She had landed a key role in Ken Russell's screen version of Valentino with Rudolf Nureyev.

"My career is now

past The Avengers," she says. "I don't want to delve back in the past. I rarely read the same book twice."

But her personality left its stamp on The Avengers. She took over the Tara King role when Clemens and Fennell were out of the series.

They were fired over a policy row, but within six weeks Thames TV were pleading with them to return. They did—as co-producers with total control.

They inherited Linda, and neither of them thought she would measure up to Honor or Diana. Clemens says:

"She was 20, straight out of drama school, expecting to be a star overnight. She hadn't the experience."

"She couldn't project a sense of humour."

But Clemens and Fennell were forced to compromise. "The series was pre sold in America and there was no time to re-cast," says Clemens.

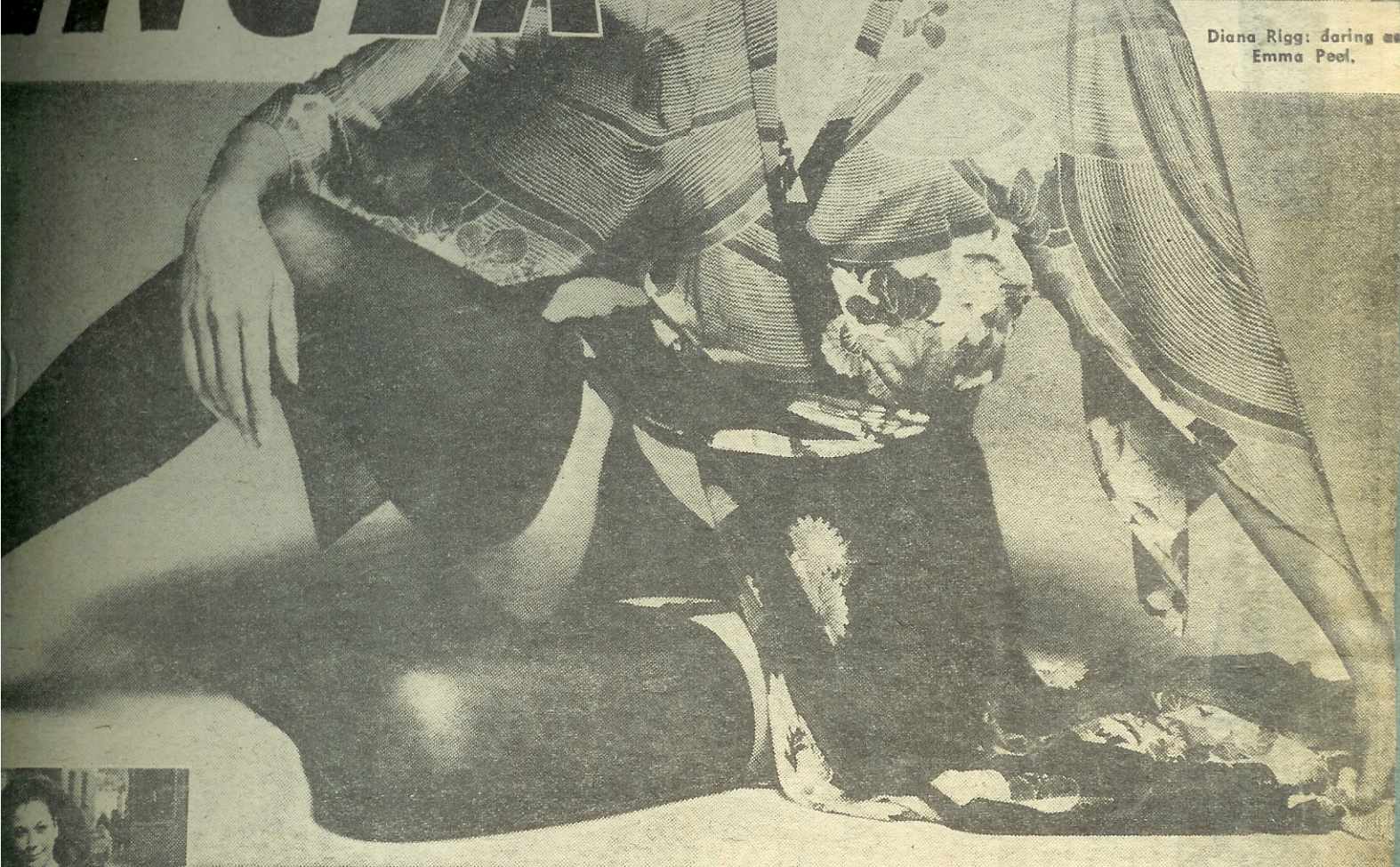
Linda admits: "I was a tough cookie. I just couldn't bear everyone



**Next Sunday: Steed spills sex secrets**

# AVENGER

Diana Rigg: daring as Emma Peel.



Linda Thorson, as Tara King, last of the old line, flaunted the mini.

Rudolph Roffi wanted to make a champagne TV commercial.

He asked if John Steed and Tara King were available.

Patrick Macnee and Linda Thorson shot the commercial at Elstree in a day. And the nostalgia burned deep.

Roffi was amazed to learn that The Avengers was no longer being made.

"Are the British crazy?" he asked.

"The British are so parochial in their thinking. How much do you need?"

"About £4,000,000," Fennell told him.

A week later Roffi telephoned him from Paris saying, "I've got half of the money. When can you start?"

Patrick Macnee was cabled in America. Linda Thorson's name was omitted from the comeback plans.

She didn't take it as a snub. She had landed a key role in Ken Russell's screen version of *Valentino* with Rudolf Nureyev.

"My career is now

past The Avengers," she says. "I don't want to delve back in the past. I rarely read the same book twice."

But her personality left its stamp on The Avengers. She took over the Tara King role when Clemens and Fennell were out of the series.

They were fired over a policy row, but within six weeks Thames TV were pleading with them to return. They did—as co-producers with total control.

They inherited Linda, and neither of them thought she would measure up to Honor or Diana. Clemens says:

"She was 20, straight out of drama school, expecting to be a star overnight. She hadn't the experience."

"She couldn't project a sense of humour."

But Clemens and Fennell were forced to compromise. "The series was pre sold in America and there was no time to re-cast," says Clemens.

Linda admits: "I was a tough cookie. I just couldn't bear everyone

telling me what to do. I know my RADA honours degree didn't count for much, but it proved I wasn't dumb."

"They terrified me about how I appeared on the set, the way I delivered my lines and my part in the fights."

"I got angry fan letters saying: 'Who do you think you are, taking over?' I didn't really know, because I had never seen Diana or Honor in the series. I was a student and couldn't afford TV."

"I bought a new dress for my first day at the studio because I had nothing good to wear."

"I prayed I wouldn't spill anything on it at the studio because next morning I took it back to the shop and told them, 'It doesn't fit me' and asked for my money back. That's how hard up I was."

Patrick Macnee was soured because after The Avengers he was offered no more work in England.

"People ask if I went abroad for tax reasons!" he complains.

He took off to America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—and made his mark in films and on stage.

On Broadway he col-

lected an award for his performance in *Sleuth*. But in the street New Yorkers who had seen The Avengers in the US always recognised him as John Steed.

Macnee never thought he would be recalled.

"I had qualms. I felt happy in America. I asked for time to think."

He brooded most over his age. He is now 51.

Could he really take on another series of swashbuckling jet style missions, pumped along by champagne and beautiful women?

"When you're in your fifties, however good you look or feel you've got to act your age," he reasons.

"You're not really supposed to start leaping into bed with young girls on the screen. It would look ludicrous."

Clemens had the solution. Steed's women in the new series would be more elegant and mature—widows, divorcees in the glamorous 30 to 40 class.

And while Steed plays the boss, Mike Gambit, played by Gareth Hunt, handles Purdey.

Hunt says: "If I've read the scripts right, my relationship with Purdey is based on a promise: 'One day it will happen.'"

Joanna "Something slightly masculine..."

"Purdey," she blurted out. "Purdey?" he queried.

"It's the name of a famous shotgun," she said. "The most elegant and expensive of them all. Perfect to handle. Deadly accurate."

Now Clemens was sure he had the right girl.

The birth of The New Avengers came by an odd twist.

French entrepreneur



**Next Sunday: Steed spills sex secrets**

re," she nothing on the chosen girls—ducers s and Clemens sting eks. r final n" to e part, and every- in the Then re was harlie. nother sked